

STAFF REPORT: 11/12/2025 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: L. SAINT JAMES

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00596

ADDRESS: 4324 (4314-4316) W. VERNOR

HISTORIC DISTRICT: HUBBARD FARMS

APPLICANT: TIMOTHY FLINTOFF JR. / 4545 ARCHITECTURE

PROPERTY OWNER: MOISES GUTIERREZ

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 09/23/2025

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 10/24/2025

SCOPE: REMOVE BRICK VENEER AT FAÇADE, INSTALL NEW BRICK CLADDING AND STOREFRONT

EXISTING CONDITIONS

This two-story early 1900s commercial building has brick veneer and features a simple rectangular form typical of small urban storefronts from that era. The brick veneer is laid in running bond and painted a dark gray color. The upper story includes two double-hung, non-historic windows with flush lintels and modest projecting brick sills. At or under the parapet, a horizontal decorative band has been affixed over the historic masonry. The ground level storefront has been heavily altered with a later brick infill, with the original display windows and entry configuration replaced and partially enclosed. The entry door is slightly recessed, and a secondary door at the left (addressed 4316) likely provides access to the upper floor.



Staff photo, 10/24/2025. Front of the building, taken from W. Vernor.



Staff photo, 10/24/2025. Rear of the building, taken from the alleyway to the North of the building.

PROPOSAL

The proposed exterior scope of work includes, but is not limited to:

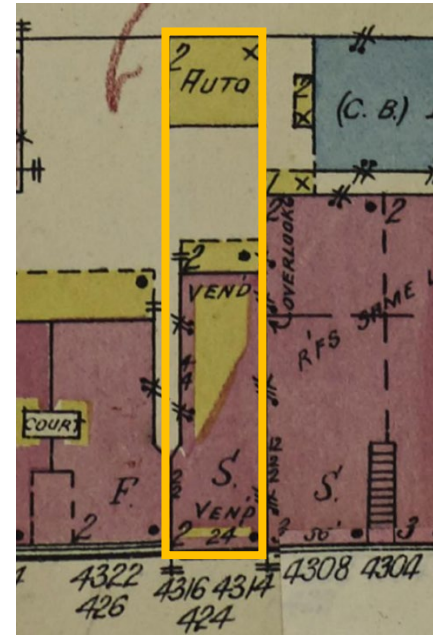
- Remove brick veneer at façade / remove existing brick and glass storefront infill
- Install new brick cladding
- Install new storefront

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Hubbard Farms Historic District was enacted in 1993.



Google Maps, edited by staff



Sanborn map, 1921

- The HDAB designation report does not specifically discuss this property. The *Bagley West Vernor Historic District* National Registry of Historic Places (NRHP) nomination draft, now under consideration, proposes this property to be a contributing building for the historic district and offers the following description and history of the building:

This two-story building has a rectangular plan and a flat, membrane-clad roof with parapet walls. A small, one-story, rectangular-plan addition extends from the building's north-facing rear elevation and also has a flat roof. The building's south-facing façade is clad in grey-painted brick. It includes a three-sided, recessed entrance bay on its first story which is flanked on both sides by one-part storefront windows with aluminum frames, set on brick bulkheads. A secondary entrance is located at the first story's west end. There are two, one-over-one, vinyl double-hung windows with stone sills and headers on the façade's second story. Colorfully painted wood boards and a steel angle beam separate the first and second stories.

This combination commercial and professional building was built in 1908. It originally housed a confectionary on the first story with apartments above. For much of the mid-twentieth century, it was owned by Canadian optometrist Frederick LeHeup and his son, Kenneth, who ran their practice on the first story and lived above. The Latinx community's continued growth after the district's period of significance is evidenced by the establishment of a notable Mexican restaurant here in the early 2000s. Taqueria La Tapatia was known as a clean, affordable restaurant that also hosted "CyberTaqueria" events that helped Latinx residents translate and send e-mail messages to their home countries during the early internet age.

Existing Façade Analysis

- Sometime between 07/2017 and 07/2018, the building was painted and the colorful, wood boards were added above the first story. No Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) was found for these alterations.



Google Street View, 07/2017



Google Street View, 07/2018

- It is staff's opinion that the horizontal band near the parapet is a non-historic, decorative addition due to the visible nails affixing it to the masonry.



Staff photos, 10/24/2025

- The existing storefront, characterized by its mostly brick infill and minimal detailing, appears to reflect a more modern, mid-century design. This is evident in the use of thinner, elongated bricks, which contrast with the more ornamental features, such as decorative wood panels, typically found in earlier historic storefronts.



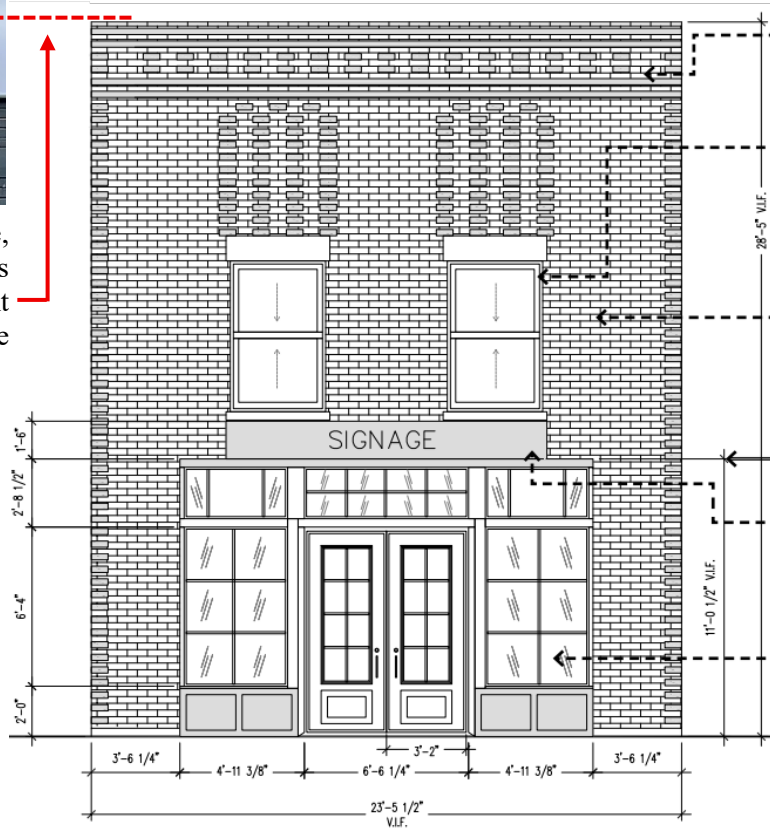
Staff photos, 10/24/2025. No elements within the yellow box are historic.

- The Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-2) for the district provide the following observations (excerpts by staff):
 - **(7) Relationship of materials.** *Brick and wood are the primary building materials originally used. Brick buildings may have pressed brick front façades with common brick sides and rears.*
 - **(19) Degree of complexity within the façade.** *The degree of complexity has been determined by what is typical and appropriate for a given style. The classically inspired buildings usually have simple, rectangular façades with varying amounts of ornamentation.*
- It is staff's opinion that the following features of this property are contributing and character-defining:
 - Brick veneer
 - Tiled edge at parapet
 - Stone lintels
 - Projecting brick sills

Proposal Analysis



With the new façade, the applicant proposes to increase the height to align with the building to the West.



*Brampton Brick
Old Chicago*



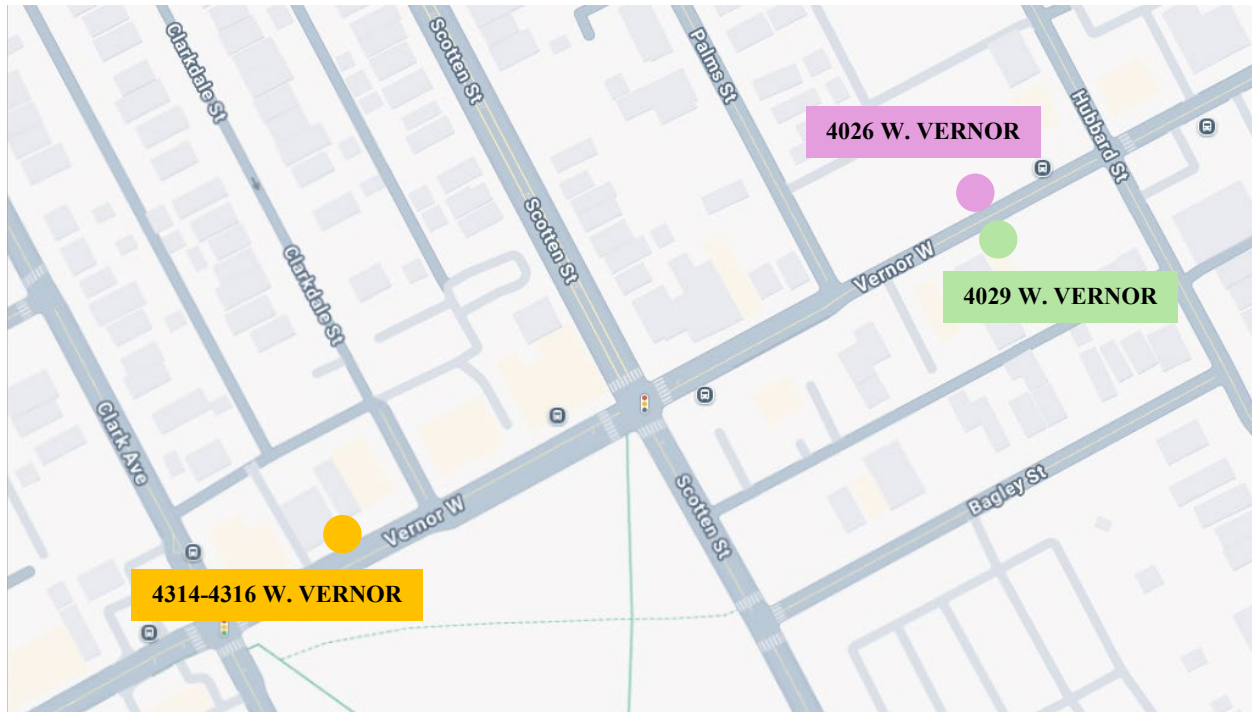
*Anderson Windows
E-Series, Double-Hung, in Black*



*Masonite Doors
Wood, in Green*

- It is staff's opinion that the applicant's proposal to remove the existing historic brick veneer at the façade is inappropriate, as the existing brick veneer is a distinctive, character-defining feature and has not been demonstrated to be beyond repair. Furthermore, the proposed new brick cladding, with its cornice and brick patterning, conveys a misleading representation of historic brick architectural details and creates a false sense of historical development. These elements are incompatible with the building's authentic and simplistic historic character.
- The historic windows were likely double-hung wood windows. If the existing, non-historic windows were there at the time of designation (although, this is unknown as the designation photos from 1993 cannot be located), the replacement windows, per the [NPS's 'Replacement Windows that Meet the Standards,'](#) must only be compatible with the historic appearance and character of the building and not necessarily exact matches: "Although replacement windows may be based on physical or pictorial documentation, if available, recreation of the missing historic windows is not required to meet the Standards. Replacement of missing or non-historic windows must, however, always fill the original window openings and must be compatible with the overall historic character of the building."
- The applicant states that the storefront system, which is proposed to be the New Anderson Architectural Series, "incorporates a new steel structure to support the existing wall while replicating the proportions and details of the front façade window, using materials such as wood, glass, and matching paint finishes."

- Staff notes that, to better understand the proposed storefront system, a detailed, dimensioned drawing of the transom window configuration was requested; however, no response was received from the applicant.
- Regarding the proposed storefront system: the use of panels, a recessed double-door entry, and transom windows is appropriate and consistent with typical storefront designs from that era and location. However, it is staff's opinion that the multi-lite design in the large display windows, transom windows, and double-doors is not historically accurate for early 20th-century storefronts in this area. Examples of nearby historic storefronts shown below illustrate this difference.



Google Maps, edited by staff



Detroit Historical Society, 4026 W. Vernor, 07/1968



Detroit Historical Society, 4029 W. Vernor, 07/1968

ISSUES

- The historic brick veneer at the façade is a distinctive, character-defining feature of the property that has not been proven to be beyond repair.
- Architectural features/elements copied from incompatible ornamental styles are not appropriate here, and create a false sense of historic development, in direct contradiction to the NPS's Standards for Rehabilitation, Standard #3.
- The proposal is missing a detailed, dimensioned drawings of the proposed storefront system.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

Section 21-2-78, Determinations of Historic District Commission

Recommendation 1 of 2 – Denial – Remove brick veneer at façade, install new brick cladding

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Hubbard Farms Historic District's Elements of Design, specifically:

Standards #:

2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.

5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.

9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

Elements of Design #: 7, 19

For the following reasons:

- The historic brick veneer at the façade is a distinctive, character-defining feature and not proven to be beyond repair.
- Introducing features that are not based on documented historical evidence, including architectural elements copied from other buildings and styles, creates a false sense of history.

Recommendation 2 of 2 – Certificate of Appropriateness – Replace storefront at existing opening, remove wood boards above storefront

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be appropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Hubbard Farms Historic District's Elements of Design, with the condition(s) that:

- The large display windows, transom windows, and double-doors are to be single-lite configurations.
- The proposed storefront system dimensioned drawings and specifications shall be provided to staff for review and approval.